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Sunshine Item
Bill 13 (2017)



Menehune Mac
CHOCOLATE FACTORY

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March 5, 2017

The Honorable Ron Menor, Chair
Committee on Executive Matters and Legal Affairs
Honolulu City Council
530 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Menor and Councilmembers:

SUBJECT: BILL 13 - A BILL FOR AN ORDINANCE RELATING TO PUBLIC SIDEWALKS

As the owners and operators of Menehune Mac, we strongly support Bill 13 that will expand the "sit-lie" law to the business areas of Kalihi. Our employees, customers and the future of our company are directly impacted by the homeless encampments and we are not the only businesses that have been negatively affected. We thank Councilmember Manahan for proposing this measure and hope that it provides relief for businesses and residents of the area.

Since the explosion of the homelessness issue and the fencing project of the Kapalama Canal area, our business has suffered a steep decline in customer traffic and the same can be said by the neighboring businesses. In the nearly two years since the fence along Kapalama canal was built, the homeless encampments along Kaumualii Street extending past Waiakamilo Road are both noticeable and troubling. We have experienced theft, property damage, urination and defecation on our property, and harassment of customers. Each time we contact the police, while sympathetic, the officer's response is the same that nothing can be done.

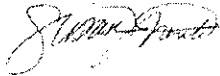
We are a proud Kalihi-based, kama'aina firm that has been in business since 1939, working hard to promote Kalihi as a family-friendly place for tourists and residents to visit and shop. We, and some of the area businesses, are trying to build a positive feel for Kalihi as a visitor destination. Ourselves, Koaloha Ukulele, Hawaiian Chip Company, and others were successfully able to bring in Japanese and mainland visitors and many were visiting our stores by different means, including City bus. Within the past year, social media messages in Japan began to warn readers that Kalihi is "dangerous" and to avoid the area due to possible harm. With those simple posts and after years of hard work to develop our reputations and build goodwill, these efforts were wiped out as seen in the nearly 80% decline in visitor traffic. This decline is directly attributable to the homeless camps outside our building.

Our business was able to survive the bursting of the economic bubble in 1994, the loss of business after the 9-11 attacks in 2001, and the recession in 2008. Today, as the encampment has effectively put a physical fence around our business and we are legally unable to do anything about it, we have no other recourse except to ask the City Council for help. Menehune Mac is in an extremely competitive market and we are determined to keep our jobs, materials sourcing and manufacturing here in Kalihi. If this situation is allowed to continue, businesses as well as residents of the area will continue to fear living and working in the area.

The Honorable Ron Menor, Chair
Committee on Executive Matters and Legal Affairs
March 5, 2017
Page 2

We are truly sympathetic to the plight of the homeless and recognize that it is a complex issue. We know that solutions are multifaceted and require the assistance from local and State government, mental health specialists, the medical community, social services providers, job counselors, public housing assistance and a host of other services. Knowing how complex the issue is, it should not mean that business and commerce should also bear with the consequences until the optimal solution is found. We are seeking relief, similar to Waikiki and other business areas have received so that our customers can feel better and that the word will again spread through social media that Kalihi is a safe to shop and visit. We urge you to pass Bill 13 and to support the businesses and residents of Kalihi who need your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Susan Morita", written in a cursive style.

Susan Morita, Manager
Menehune Mac